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ABSTRACT

A survey form distributed to 30 superintendents in the area nearby the University of Toledo consisted of eight items concerning the respondents' opinions about school-community relations. All of the items except one were open-ended. Included in the mailing to each of the superintendents were two additional survey forms to be sent to a principal to be selected by the superintendent. The principals were requested to fill out one form themselves and give the second to any teacher they chose. Responses were received from 14 superintendents, 11 principals, and 10 teachers. For the first question, "List some concepts or principles of school-community relations that you believe are sound and good guides to action," complete responses by groups are listed. The remaining questions concerned the following aspects of school-community relations: (1) helpful practices; (2) examples of good school-community relations; (3) examples of poor school-community relations; (4) bases for decisions; (5) problems; (6) source of knowledge; and (7) ranking on a 10-point scale of how the school-community feels about schools. Responses are listed by categories with a sample response to each. Eight tables illustrate the categories of response by group. (MLF)

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The University of Toledo

College of Education and Allied Professions

Department of Educational Leadership

REPORT TO PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS SURVEY

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Presented To Toledo Area Superintendents Group
December, 1984
By Richard W. Saxe, Distinguished Professor
The University of Toledo

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REPORT TO PARTICIPANTS
IN
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS SURVEY

Introduction

In Autumn 1984 a survey was distributed to 30 superintendents in the area nearby The University of Toledo. The purpose of the survey was to add to our knowledge of the "state of the art" of school-community relations in the area immediately surrounding the University.

The survey form consisted of eight items concerning the respondents' opinions about school-community relations. All of the items except one were open-ended probes permitting a great variety of responses. Included in the mailing to each of the superintendents were two additional survey forms. Both of these were to be sent to a principal to be selected by the superintendent. The principals were requested to fill out one form themselves and give the second to any teacher they chose. All of the survey forms were identical except for color coding. The directions in the cover letters were also identical except for those concerning the distribution of forms referred to above (i.e., the superintendent was requested to send two forms to a principal and the principal was asked to send one form to a teacher).

Response

There was no follow-up of any kind. The number and percent of response are shown in Table 1. There is no way of knowing whether principals and teachers working with non-responding superintendents ever received the survey. Most likely the respondents by roles are from the same districts. It is also to be expected that principals' responses would be less than superintendents' and teachers' would be less than principals' due to predictable

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TABLE 1
RESPONSES TO S-C-R SURVEY (N = 30)

Position	No. Response	% Response of Group
Superintendent	14	.46
Principal	12	.4
Teacher	10	.33
To	36	.4

failures to pass the forms on to the other positions. None of this concerns us in this exploratory survey but it does suggest a probable weakness in this approach to gathering information for future reference. We have used 30 as the number for each group even though the actual number of surveys delivered to principals and teachers was almost certainly less than that.

Results

We will attempt to provide a general answer to each question. For the first question we begin with a complete response of answers by groups. The reason for this is that we believe there is considerable interest in this information and, moreover, it permits respondents to see how we proceed from these complete replies to summaries by categories.

Item 1. List Some Concepts or Principles of School-Community Relations That You Believe Are Sound and Good Guides to Action.

Responses from superintendents follow:

1. Be honest.
2. Establish credibility and support with all media.
3. Get out into the community as much and as often as possible.
4. Try to enlist the entire school staff as an extension of the public relations office.

5. The facilities should be used by the community.

6. The schools should perform as many public service projects as possible.

7. School districts must communicate to the community.

8. Providing for two-way communication with your various constituencies.

9. School must have linkages with the community that will keep it informed as to community expectations.

10. Two-way lines of communication such that all members of the community have access to information about the school and may also communicate to the school their support and/or concerns.

11. The school must plan on using multiple strategies in relating to the community.

12. An involved, informed community can be convinced to support schools financially.

13. Community must be informed (continually) that schools are doing a sound job of teaching kids and that good discipline is maintained.

14. Problems/questions raised by community members must be answered on a timely basis.

15. Administrators must be honest and above board.

16. Faculty members must not appear to be overbearing and self-righteous.

17. All school personnel must continue to paint positive pictures of the school setting.

18. The community must feel proud of its schools and the accomplishments of students.

19. Honestly-report success as well as problems in a truthful objective manner.

20. Consistency in dealing with problems. Don't show favoritism.

21. Be open to suggestions and criticisms. Avoid being defensive.

22. Involve parents, staff, citizens in discussing and recommending solutions to problems.

23. Have a planned on-going program of communicating with the public.

24. Be visible.

25. Keep board executive sessions to a minimum.

26. District administrators must be visible and accessible to community.

27. Good community communication dictates more than "one-way" communication.

28. Keep parents/community actively informed regardless if you are solvent or financially in trouble.

29. Good community relations extends the school into the community. Make the school an important part of every person's life.

30. Do not be afraid to inform and especially involve the community with evaluating school programs.

31. Get as much community involvement in schools as possible (in non-emotionally loaded situation if possible).

32. Accent the positives - tell your story.

33. Develop "awareness" of what is going on throughout system among all staff members as they "carry the word" into community and are more effective sources of information than other media.

34. The public must be informed.

35. The information must be accurate.

36. Positive and negative areas of school operation must be stressed.

37. Highlight as many positive student accomplishments as possible. Do not over-do sports.

38. Positive school-community relations begins with the employees. A superintendent or board can say all they want but what really counts is what the employees say and do.

39. Be honest always.

40. Communicate problems and success regularly.

41. Be highly visible in the community.

42. Be friendly.

43. Treat every human being with dignity.

44. Hire excellent teachers, administrators.

Responses from <u>principals</u> follow:

1. Open house.

2. School newsletter.

3. Board newsletter.

4. Cable television.

5. Newspaper reports.

6. PTA meetings.

7. Education fair.

8. Keeping parents informed regarding progress of their child.

9. Keeping community informed regarding school as a whole.

10. Maintaining good two-way communication.

11. Recognizing and working within power structure of the community.

12. Maintaining a professional attitude by staff with a sensitivity to community.

13. Communication.

14. Availability.

15. Openness.

16. Willing to cooperate or at least listen to general public.

17. Parent input and involvement in school decision making, using parents as sounding boards for ideas and information.

18. Being visible and available.

19. Showing that you sincerely care.

20. Always try to find something positive to say about children.

21. Joint involvement in projects.

22. Learn who your community leaders are. Observe styles of people.

23. Continually communicate.

24. Show that you care.

25. ORC regulations re. public access to records, etc.

26. "Care and feeding" of advisory committees (on "Ad hoc' basis for target projects) (On standing committees for administration) (Principal's advisory committees, etc.).

27. Positive "news" releases and cultivation of media - "Best foot forward."

28. Active involvement of concerned citizens in school activities.

29. Active participation by community groups in school affairs such as PTA, Mothers Club, etc.

30. Involvement of parents.

31. Keeping parents informed of what is happening at school.

32. Keeping other staff (e.g., custodians, cafeteria, etc.) aware of goings on.

33. Steady stream of positive news home to parents.

34. Handle each concern to its fullest.

35. Be positive (as much as possible) with all.

36. Promote your school program in a positive view.

37. Communication between parents and teachers should be frequent and positive.

38. Involvement of community in planning.

39. Honesty in dealing with all is important.

40. Provide frequent communication techniques to parents i.e., newsletters, parent meetings, conferences, open house.

41. I try to put myself in the position of the parents/students and plan my action from that perspective.

42. Honesty, sincerity, and clarity are my touchstones.

43. Accessibility to all groups, individuals, etc.

44. Adult education.

45. Promote via media education programs being offered.

46. Newsletters.

47. Do a good job and tell people about it.

48. Be positive in personal concepts.

49. Provide as much personal service as possible e.g., meeting with prospective resident.

50. Parent involvement-volunteer education, parent club.

51. Information to media.

52. Newsletters

53. Open house.

54. Offer community multiple opportunities to get involved. Make certain they know that the school is their school.

55. Key communicators in community.

56. Open house.

57. School newsletter.

58. Board newsletter.

59. T.V.

60. Newspaper report.

61. PTA meetings.

62. Education fair.

63. It is extremely important for parents to understand that boards of education are a policy-making body only.

64. Develop with as many activities which can be implemented, a confidence in schools (local) and their ability to achieve goals. Be realistic.

Response from the teachers follows:

1. The willingness to work together in a cooperative spirit.

2. Making it a priority-taking the time to contact each other.

3. Frequent communications.

4. The teacher and the school, by knowing the parents, will be able to understand the child better.

5. The parents and community members need to observe, discuss and be involved with the teachers and school processes to be familiar with the problems facing public schools.

6. Good communication between both parties.

7. Strong school board with both parents and teachers on it.

8. Parents active in the school.

9. The school is a public enterprise.

10. The school has the function and responsibility to seek out truth and teach people to live by it.

11. There must be a structural, systematic, and active participation by the people of the community in the educational planning, policy making, problem solving, and evaluation of the school.

12. A two-way system of communication between school and community.

13. The school and community need to work together for benefit of all.

14. The school plays an important part in the community and should be supported financially and socially.

15. School needs to build a sense of pride and involvement.

16. Communications open between community and school should be extended and continued.

17. Open communication between school-parents-community.

18. Community support of school-related activities.

19. PR dissemination from school to community on a regular basis.

20. Honesty in communications.

21. Always keep the community informed.

22. Allow community input into the school's operation.

23. Don't discuss school board business behind close doors. This allows the community to hear the discussion and know where board members stand.

24. Communicate through all available means - newspapers, flyers, open-forms, is essential.

25. An "open-door policy" where parents feel at ease in asking for an appointment to discuss any problem.

26. Stress in classroom that student is part of school and part of community - his responsibility to both. Help him define his needed actions to be a part of both.

27. Always stress the good and use honest objective criticism.

This list of concepts was then reviewed and collapsed into categories based on identity or similarity of the concepts identified. The results of this activity yielded 30 items in the area of "community involvement" (examples "involvement in community in planning," "involvement of parents"), 45 items in the category of "communication" (e.g., "the public must be informed"), 17 in the category "honesty" (e.g., "be honest always"), 16 in the category "stress possitive aspects of school" (e.g., "do a good job and tell people about it"), 18 in the category "open door policy" (e.g., "Don't discuss school business behind closed doors"), 7 in the category "education" (e.g.,

"It is extremely important for parents to understand that boards of education are a policy-making body only."), and 3 in the category "identify community power structure" (e.g., "Recognize and work within the power structure of the community").

These results in tabular form are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

PRINCIPLES OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category	Times Cited By:			
	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher	Total
Communication	9	26	10	45
Community Involvement	9	10	11	30
Open Door Policy	8	8	2	18
Honesty	11	4	2	17
Stress positive	6	8	2	16
Education	2	5	-	7
Identify power st.	-	3	-	3
	45	64	27	136

Item 2. List Some Practices or Procedures That You Believe are Helpful in Getting and/or Maintaining Good School-Community Relations.

Responses to this question fell into five categories. Those, with a sample response of each, follow:

Communication: "Communicate, communicate, communicate."

Community Involvement: "Involve more parents in classes, booster clubs, etc."

Education: "Inservicing school personnel on the importance of good school-community relations."

Open door policy: "Open house"

Emphasize the positive: "Keep outside and inside appearances of the buildings looking good."

In Table 3 we present the responses by categories.

TABLE 3

HELPFUL PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Practice	Times Cited By:			
	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher	Total
Communication	27	37	18	82
Community Involvement	13	14	8	35
Education	6	2	3	11
Open door policy	-	3	3	6
Emphasize the positive	1	3	-	4
Total	47	59	32	138

Item 3. An example of good school-community relations is:

As you would imagine there were a rich variety of responses to this item. Once again, we forced them into categories. The categories and a sample response for each follow:

Community involvement: "Opening buildings early each day for joggers and senior citizens who wish to walk."

Good communication system." Newsletter every Friday."

Good school record: "Trust, of the board, administrators and teachers."

Open house: "Grandparents day."

School improvement committee: "Advisory committee reviews curriculum of specific courses taught."

Education: "Day care services."

School clubs: "Golden Apple Club is an example."

The responses to this question are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4

EXAMPLES OF GOOD SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category	Times Cited By:			
	Superintendent	Principal	Teacher	Total
Community involvement	4	7	8	19
Good communication system	3	5	8	16
Good school record	2	3	3	8
Open house	4	2	1	7
School improvement committee	2	1	1	4
Education		3		3
School clubs	1			1
Total	16	21	21	58

Item 4. An example of poor school-community relations is:

Categories for this item with a representative response follow:

Poor communication: "Any school that does not communicate to its community."

Poor school management: "Not making it clear about policy vs. administrative role of the board."

Closed door policy: "A school that operates from 8 to 3 and then locks its doors."

No community involvement: "Infrequent contact between home and school."

Negative attitude: "Lack of positive attitude."

Dishonesty: "Misleading information"

Adverse publicity: "Bad press"

Responses to this question are summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5

EXAMPLES OF POOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Example Category	Times Cited By			
	Supt.	Prin.	Tchr.	Total
Poor communication	8	10	8	26
Poor management	--	10	--	10
Closed door policy	3	1	3	7
No community involvement	2	2	2	6
Negative attitude	2	1	6	9
Dishonesty	2	--	--	2
Adverse publicity	--	1	1	2
	17	25	20	62

Question 5. In a typical situation requiring a decision on your part affecting school-community relations what is your decision most likely to be based on? (Assume that the issue is not one that can clearly be determined by application of an existing policy.)

The categories and a sample response in each category follow.

Effect on students	"How it will affect students"
General good	"Action based on greatest benefit to all"
Effect on community	"How it will affect the community"
Sound educational rationale	"Will my decisions help education"
Past history and experience	"Study general part-practice in related matter"
Consultation with key people	"Consultation with key state members, president and/or other members of the board of education and perhaps recognized community leaders"
Effect on budget	"How it will affect budgets"
Effect on staff	"How it will affect staff"

Responses to this question are summarized in Table 6

TABLE 6

BASES FOR DECISIONS ABOUT
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category	Times Cited By: Supt.	Prin.	Tchr.	Total
Effect or. students	8	4	6	18
General good	1	6	5	12
Effect on Community	2	1	3	6
Sound educational rationale	1	4	1	6
Past history and experience	2	2	--	4
Consultation with key people	2	1	--	3
Effect on budget	1	2	--	3
Effect on staff	2	--	--	2
Total	19	20	15	54

Question 6. The greatest problem in school community relations in my district (school, classroom) is:

Categories and sample responses to this question follow.

Lack of community involvement	"Complacency with less than desirable educational conditions"
Negative attitudes	"Staff member who reside in the community who spreads negative impressions"
Communicating regularly	"Size and diversity of the community are a challenge in maintaining on-going communication"
Conditions of current program	"Maintenance of ongoing activities"
High expectations	"Too high expectations for children"
Board of education	"The board"
Bargaining/contracts	"Problems arising from bargaining and contracts"
Press relations	"Only negative is reported"

A summary of responses to this question follows in Table 4.

TABLE 7

PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category	Time Cited By: Supt.	Prin.	Tchr.	Total
Lack of community involvement	2	3	3	8
Negative attitudes	2	2	3	7
Communicating regularly	4	1	2	7
Conditions of current program	1	3	1	5
High expectations	3	2	--	5
Board of education	--	1	2	3
Bargaining/Contracts	1	1	--	2
Press relations	1	1	--	2
Total	14	14	11	39

Question 7. Where did you learn most about how to deal with community relations?

Responses to this question are summarized in Table 8.

TABLE 8

SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT
SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Category	Times Cited By: Supt.	Prin.	Tchr.	Total
On the job experience	8	10	12	30
Graduate study	3	8	3	14
Colleagues	2	3	--	5
Watching others	3	--	--	3
Common sense	1			1
Total	17	21	15	53

Question 8. On a ten point scale please indicate how you think your school-community feels about your schools.

The mean scores for the groups were:

Superintendents.....7.79
Principals.....7.42
Teachers.....6.8

Superintendentsclustered in the 6-9 range, principals ratings ranged from 5 to 9. Teacher's ratings ranged from 4 to 10. There were no ratings below 4.

There may be many reasons for these differences. Chances are the respondents in the different groups are rating different communities--a district community, a school community and a sub-set of the school community.